MISSION: Philosophy is essential to the liberal arts and sciences because of its historical and continuing commitment to answering fundamental questions (including fundamental questions about other disciplines), and to advancing rigorous, clear, analytical discourse and argumentation about those questions. The Iowa philosophy department has a history of research and teaching excellence in the core areas of philosophy, where we have broken important new ground on such issues as the nature of ethical properties, the relationship between the brain and mind, the intersection of science and philosophy, and the nature and scope of human knowledge. One of the reasons for our success in shedding light on contemporary problems is that we are interested in tracing the insights and concerns that are at the root of each debate, and the historical turns that these debates take up to the present. As a department, we are interested in philosophy, and we are interested in the history of philosophy. We have an outstanding cohort of faculty working in ethics and value theory. We sponsor an MA/JD program, and we are excited about the prospect of developing it in conjunction with our new undergraduate pre-law major, Ethics and Public Policy.

ADMISSION PROCESSES AND CRITERIA: The philosophy department has a three-person graduate admissions committee that reviews all applicant files and decides which applicants are to be admitted to the PhD program. Our entering students excel in comparison to other humanities graduate students at Iowa:

- From 1996 to 2007, the average GPA of our entering students was 3.60, which is .12 higher than the already-impressive UI humanities average of 3.48 (which already includes the high philosophy average).
- For 2008 and 2009, the average GPA of our entering students was 3.68.
- From 2003-06, the last period for which students took all three of the verbal, quantitative, and analytical reasoning sections of the GRE, our students scored on average 227 points above the UI humanities average, and again the latter already includes the extremely high philosophy scores.
- For 2004-7, our students scored an average 615 on the Verbal section and 649 on the quantitative, compared to 595 and 592, respectively, for the UI humanities average.
- For 2008 and 2009, the average philosophy scores were 651 Verbal and 730 Quantitative, and 4.8/6 on the Analytical Writing section.

We have had success at enrolling Presidential Fellows – one of our 3rd-year students and one of our 4th-year students are Presidential Fellows – but due to retirements our extremely small faculty size (even for philosophy departments in the Midwest) prevents us from being able to recruit many of the best of these. We have also been successful at enrolling Dean’s Graduate Fellows. Since 2004, we have made five offers, and four students accepted.

We currently have two other means of support for our incoming students. One is a first-year area-of-strength fellowship that we offer to two students who plan to work in metaphysics or epistemology. The funds for this fellowship are from Strategic Initiative Funds through the Graduate College (589K total for 2008-9 and 2009-10), the Gustav and Leola Bergmann Graduate Fellowship fund, and also a departmental contribution (mostly from DCE funds). These students also receive a commitment of four years of teaching assistantship. The second additional means of support for incoming students is a commitment of five years of teaching assistantship.

Women and minorities remain underrepresented at all levels in the discipline of philosophy. According to the most recent compilation of data from the American Philosophical Association, from 1991 to 1996 there were 1808 Philosophy PhDs awarded in the United States, with the following representation of women and minorities: 27% women, 3.4% Asian-American, 2.9% Hispanic, 1.9% African-American, 3% Native American. The Iowa Philosophy Department has worked very hard to counter these numbers, and in recent years we have been successful in attracting minority students. In both 2004 and 2005, one out of our three entering students was funded by a Dean’s Graduate Fellowship; in 2007 it was one of six students, and in 2008 it was one of four.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES:
I. Time-to-Degree
The department’s time-to-degree has improved markedly in the last few years. For students who graduated in 1999-2006, the time-to-degree (or TTD) was 8.9 years. To improve that number, we have taken a number of steps.

- First, we have crafted an informal but comprehensive statement of normative progress (an accessible and shorthand version of our rules and regulations) that lets students know for every stage of their graduate career exactly what they need to do and when, so that they know when they need to start thinking about deadlines and requirements that are up ahead, and so that there is plenty of time to plan and plenty of room for error.
- Second, we offer pre-comps summer fellowships (with the help of Strategic Initiative Funds) to students who have completed their second year of study and who are on track to take the comprehensive exam in their third year. For summer 2008, all six students awarded the fellowship completed their comprehensive exam by the end of spring 2009, and are on course to finish their dissertation within five or six years.
Third, we now require that every student in the 3rd year or beyond submit a packet of their work in advance of the department’s annual review of graduate students (held in early March). The 3rd-year students submit a completed draft of their comprehensive exam questions; the 4th-year students submit their dissertation prospectus and any dissertation pages that they have produced; and students in their 5th year and beyond submit drafted and completed chapters of the dissertation. Students have found these yardsticks to be very helpful.

Fourth, we send a letter to all students who are entering their 6th year and who have not completed the dissertation, indicating that they are not making satisfactory progress toward their degree and that they are in danger of dismissal from the program. We also encourage these students to meet with faculty to discuss time-management strategies and other tools for managing obstacles that stand in the way of completing a dissertation.

As a result of our aggressive efforts, the TTD for students who finished in 2007-2009 improved dramatically to 6.4 years (a total of 7 students), and we expect that number to shrink even further for 2010 and beyond. We are also very proud that of the 69 students who entered the program from 1991 through 2002, 77% have received a graduate degree from our department – 55% completed the PhD, and 22% graduated with the MA.

II. Quality and Activity of Graduate Students

In recent years, the graduate students have organized the University of Iowa Graduate Philosophy Society. Every year the society hosts an in-house conference in the fall and also a national graduate student conference in the spring. The national conference features a distinguished keynote speaker.

They frequently present papers at refereed graduate-student and more general professional conferences in the U.S. and around the world: since 2008, in Prague, Vienna, Halifax, and Marburg.

We also encourage our students to publish their work in professional journals, and we help them throughout the process. In the last three years our students have published twelve articles in professional journals, and one has secured a contract to edit a volume of articles with Blackwell Publishing.

Since 2002 our graduate students have been awarded six Ballard-Seashore Awards.

In the last four years our graduate students have been awarded four Outstanding TA Awards. Our graduate student teachers are among the best at the University of Iowa, and they are integral to our mission of providing a first-rate education to our undergraduates. Every fall the department runs an intensive three-day TA training workshop, and all faculty and teaching assistants are required to participate.

Our students have also been active in graduate student governance at the graduate college level and have been regular participants in the annual Jakobsen Graduate Student Forum in the spring semester.

III. Placement

Our program’s primary goal is to produce professional philosophers able to secure positions in philosophy departments in colleges or universities. We have been very successful in placing our students.

From 1992 to 1996, the department awarded seventeen PhDs. Of these, thirteen (or 76.5%) secured tenure-track positions, two are lecturers in philosophy, and two are using their philosophical training in other professions.

From 1997 to June 2009, the department awarded thirty-four PhDs. Of these, twenty have secured tenure-track positions in a college or university, ten are lecturers in philosophy, one teaches in a preparatory academy, one is still seeking employment in philosophy, and three left the profession for other careers. If we include in this group one of our students who is ABD but has landed a tenure-track position, twenty-one of thirty-five students (or 60%) who graduated from 1997 to June 2009 have secured tenure-track jobs.

Our students have secured tenure-track positions at a number of outstanding schools, including University of Western Ontario, The Ohio State University, UMass Amherst, Purdue University, Florida State University, St. Louis University, Marquette University, James Madison University, Trinity College, Iowa State University, College of Wooster, National Chung Cheng University (Taiwan), University of Hyderabad (India), University of Incheon (South Korea), and Soo Chow University (Taiwan).

Some of the PhDs from the first group (1992 to 1996) started out as philosophy lecturers immediately after graduation, and ended up in tenure-track positions later; we expect the same from the 1997-2009 graduates.

It should be emphasized that these placement numbers are not a reflection of our having graduated an unreasonably small percentage of entering students. As noted above, since 1991 77% of our entering students have earned either the PhD or MA.

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS: The Iowa philosophy department is very small in comparison to other CIC and Big Ten universities. The average size of the other Big Ten philosophy departments is 20.1 faculty. We have
recently shrunk from our high of 11 faculty to only 8.5 faculty. The next smallest department in the Big Ten has 17 (Illinois, Northwestern, and Minnesota are tied). We are the only philosophy graduate program in the state of Iowa. There is no doubt that national reputation, which is crucial to attracting high-quality graduate students, is related to the size of a department; thus, a certain critical mass of faculty is essential to the fulfillment of our responsibilities. One of these is to teach and supervise sections of our GER courses; in 2007-8 (the most recent year for which we have the data) the ratio of GER credit hours to FTE was 861.74. Another responsibility is to cover required courses for both the undergraduate major and the graduate program. Due to our commitments at the undergraduate level, we are each able to teach on average only one graduate-level (150+) course per year. To continue to attract a high quality and diverse student cohort, and to ensure that students are able to complete required coursework in a timely manner, we need to guarantee a robust selection of graduate courses that we can cover on a regular basis. Another responsibility is to take all of the steps that allow our students to finish the PhD in five to six years. With our 8.5 faculty, and with a minimum of 5 faculty serving on comprehensive exam committees and on prospectus and dissertation committees, and with a commitment to take on the one-on-one research courses that help students to prepare for all of these, our situation is strained. We are also invested in maintaining and enhancing the strong research profile that is associated with the University of Iowa. In the last five years, our faculty have published over eighty scholarly articles and a number of books: including three at Routledge, three at Blackwell, two at Cambridge, and one at Oxford. CLAS has recognized that 8.5 faculty is grossly insufficient for the mission of the philosophy department and has made a commitment to funding additional lines, but we are also hoping that the university will capitalize on the opportunity afforded by our per capita strength and provide us with the resources to become a first-tier program.

Our faculty have also been active on campus and in the community. Professor Figdor has made important connections with faculty and students in the psychology, neurology, and computer science departments. Professor Cunning has been an active participant at POROI seminars and institutes. Professors Fumerton and Jeske recently organized an interdisciplinary conference on law and philosophy. Professor Landini recently organized an international conference on the history of analytic philosophy. Professor Duerlinger has done interdisciplinary research with faculty from the classics department. Professor Fales has done important work on the philosophical implications of mapping the human genome. Professors Fales, Fumerton, Jeske, and Landini have participated in summer workshops to recruit women and minority students to the University of Iowa. Many of our faculty and graduate alumni have been heavily involved in developing the critical reasoning sections of the LSAT, GMAT, and MCAT exams for ACT.

We continue our efforts to recruit women and minority students to our graduate program. A challenge that we have faced, however, is that these students are much more easily recruited by larger departments. We have had some success, but one of the reasons that we want to increase our faculty numbers is to give us the best possible chance to recruit and train students from diverse backgrounds.

CONCLUSIONS:

Due to retirements we have become an extremely small department, but we have an outstanding reputation, and we believe that per capita we are as good as any department in the country. Our nine-person department is ranked at level 5 (out of 41) in terms of overall research productivity (output and quality) among philosophy departments worldwide by the prestigious online philosophy blog Philosophists.info. This is extraordinary for a department our size; other institutions in this tier include The City University of New York, King’s College-University of London, University of Toronto, and University of California, Irvine. We are ranked higher than the extremely reputable philosophy departments at University of Pennsylvania, The Johns Hopkins University, University of Southern California, the London School of Economics, Northwestern University, The Ohio State University, Indiana University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Penn State, and UCLA. In the Big Ten, we are behind only University of Wisconsin at Madison and University of Michigan, and they have 18 and 24 faculty, respectively. We are confident that with a small but significant addition of five or more outstanding hires we could come to be regarded as an elite program in our areas of concentration. We aim to build on our current strength in metaphysics and epistemology, which already allows us to recruit some of the best students in the country. We hope to build on our strength in the history of philosophy, which informs all of the work that we do, and which has been a core of our placement success. We hope to build on our strength in ethics by developing our MA/JD program and our new undergraduate major in Ethics and Public Policy.